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## An insider's guide to Lugano

Bally CEO Nicolas Giroto on the open-air delights of the town where Switzerland and Italy meet

Christina Ohly Evans. Photography by Jolie Zocchi AUGUST 2 2023



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I'm originally from Bordeaux, but I moved from Zürich to Lugano eight years ago and I love the quality of life here. Lugano feels like a small village but one that's very close to the cities of Milan and Zürich, which is just two hours away. It has a Mediterranean feel in summer – or almost like Vietnam – with its lush, steep mountains falling into the lakes and a colour spectrum that ranges from emerald green to deep shades of blue.

The cultural mix is varied, with many international schools and most people speaking multiple languages. While the Ticino region is Swiss, the lifestyle is very Italian, and both the arts and gastronomic scenes are thriving. From summer events such as the open-air [Locarno Film Festival](#) that's held in the Piazza Grande to the [Estival Jazz festival](#) in July, everything is focused on being outdoors and by the water.



Lugano and its lake © Milo Zanecchia



Hotel Gabbani

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## While the region is Swiss, the lifestyle is very Italian

Because we get plenty of visitors, there are many wonderful places to stay, including belle époque gems such as the [Hotel Splendide Royal](#) overlooking Lake Lugano which is pure old-world glamour. [The View](#) also overlooks the lake but is a more modern, all-suite offering, while the [Cá dal Bigatt](#) is a boutique hotel with just 23 rooms that feels very low-key. In the heart of Lugano you'll find a completely different kind of experience at [Gabbani](#), a small hotel in a typical Ticinese house.



Nicolas Giroto at Gabbani restaurant © Jolie Zocchi

For the best coffee in town, I start the day at either [Mauri](#), which has a café inside a larger concept store, or at Gabbani. For lunch – particularly on Sunday – I'll be up the mountain at [Ristorante Vicania](#), with its outstanding views and local specialities such as polenta with cheese and tartare. If people are visiting, I might take them to [Meta](#), which is a Michelin one-star on the lake that feels very Mediterranean.





Steak tartare at Ristorante Vicania © Egle Berruti





An outside table at Ristorante Vicania © Egle Berruti

The most important thing to do in Lugano is take a boat to explore the grottos that are only accessible from the water, to get a feel for what makes this southern part of Switzerland so special. Boats are a fun way to travel to the area's museums and art galleries as well. The [Braglia Foundation](#) offers an outstanding art collection that includes works by Giorgio de Chirico, René Magritte and Jean-Michel Basquiat, while [Museo Hermann Hesse](#) is devoted to the work of the German-Swiss poet and artist. The new [Bally Foundation](#), set in the Villa Heleneum – a '30s palace with flowering gardens – is surrounded by the mountains of Monte San Salvatore, Monte Generoso and Monte San Giorgio. This permanent space will feature exhibitions that celebrate artists and foster dialogue.





Giroto outside the Bally store in Lugano © Jolie Zocchi



Museo Hermann Hesse

I'm an outdoorsy person and I love mountain biking. One of my favourite routes is the Motto della Croce-Capanna Monte Bar loop and after a tough, two-hour ride uphill it's a joy to stop at one of the mountain huts, have a meal and just enjoy the view. The whole Carona region is full of excellent trails for cyclists and hikers as well.

Rowing is popular here as we are surrounded by steep mountains, so it is very sheltered. The [Ceresio rowing club](#) is a hub for the community, but serious sailors will want to head for Lake Maggiore to the north, where there is more wind. I also love to visit the Valle Verzasca in summer; the river here has been dubbed "the Maldives of Switzerland" for its emerald-coloured water. There is a long-standing tradition of people jumping from the old bridges here for a refreshing swim.





Cá dal Bigatt hotel

In winter, I'm a cross-country skier and the frozen lake in San Bernardino offers some great groomed terrain. Downhill skiing isn't far away either, with Andermatt right near the border between Italy and Switzerland. One and a half hours from Lugano and you're on the slopes, with maybe a stay at the excellent [Chedi Andermatt](#). The Swiss trains add to the overall atmosphere here, with everyone moving between towns with skis slung over their shoulders in winter, or with bikes in the summer months.

People are moving to Lugano for the international flavour combined with so much natural beauty. I hope this worldliness only continues to grow. What I hope never changes, though, is the number of sunny days per year. Even when it's cold, Lugano always has a wonderful Mediterranean feel.

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